

Preparing for Emergencies in Montgomery County

As Hurricane Katrina made painfully clear, older adults and people with disabilities are among the most vulnerable when disaster strikes. Still, whether it's due to the threat of terrorism or a severe winter storm, all Montgomery County residents should prepare for emergencies. This article will describe ways to plan ahead, stock an emergency medical kit, assemble a disaster supplies kit, and stay informed.

Plan Ahead

Keep contact information complete and up-to-date. Make sure you have current home, work, and cell phone numbers of people you'll need to contact in an emergency. Make sure relatives and friends have *your* phone number, and the numbers of nearby friends or neighbors whom they can call in case you're unable to answer the phone. Place this information in several places - in a travel wallet, purses and suitcases.

Pick two meeting places—one near your home but a safe distance away and the other outside the neighborhood. The home of a friend who can host your family for a few days is an ideal out-of-neighborhood meeting spot. Make sure everyone has this friend's address and phone number.

Make travel arrangements in case of evacuation. Talk to family members about what you would do in the event of an evacuation. If you have a very elderly or disabled loved one, try not to get separated from him or her during an evacuation. If a loved one lives in a facility, find out where he or she will be taken in case of evacuation.

If you or an older loved one has a chronic health problem, consider ordering a medical ID bracelet or pendant. This may be particularly helpful if there is a health problem which may make communicating with emergency workers difficult. Put identification information and a list of diagnoses and medications in a traveler's wallet that can be worn in an emergency.

Meet your neighbors. Get to know your neighbors and plan how you can work together after a disaster. How can you help neighbors with special needs, such as the frail elderly or persons with disabilities? Make a place for childcare in case parents can't get home.

Stock an Emergency Medical Kit

Medications Include a two-week supply in original packaging. (In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, some pharmacies refilled medications without prescriptions to those with the original bottle or box.) If your medications require refrigeration, buy ice packs and an insulated bag big enough to hold a two-week supply. Keep the ice packs in the freezer. If you need to leave in an emergency, you can quickly grab your medications, put them in the bag with the ice packs, and tuck them into an emergency medical kit.

Since insurance companies usually won't pay for more than a 30-day supply, consider asking your doctor for an extra prescription and paying for it out-of-pocket. As an added precaution, ask your doctor what to do if your emergency supply doesn't last through an emergency, or gets lost/damaged.

Medical equipment such as blood sugar monitoring equipment, a blood pressure cuff, hearing aid batteries and any other devices used regularly.

Written information List any medical problems and how they're being treated, including the names of drugs and their doses as well as Medicare, Medicaid and other insurance information.

Extra pair of eyeglasses, hearing aides or dentures.

Assemble a Disaster Supplies Kit

A disaster supplies kit should include your contact information and medical kit as well as water, food, basic supplies, maps, changes of clothing, blankets, cash, first aid kit, and basic hygiene products. For more details, call the American Red Cross at 202-303-4498 or go to www.montgomerycountymd.gov/apc.

Stay Informed

Montgomery County officials can use the Roam Secure Alert Network to contact you during a major crisis or emergency. Alert Montgomery can deliver important emergency alerts, notifications and updates to you on all of your devices at once. To sign up, go to: <http://alert.montgomerycountymd.gov/index.php?CCheck=1>

In the event of an emergency, turn on your radio and listen for information from the Emergency Broadcast System on [WTOP](#) (FM-103.5) and [WMAL](#) (AM-630).

For Public Health and Emergency Information:

<http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/mcgtmpl.asp?url=/content/pio/news/pubHealth.asp>

Resources for this article include the Montgomery County website and “Emergency Preparedness Tips for Older Adults” published by the AGS Foundation for Health in Aging.